

The "X" Bacillus

Revelations of An Ambassador-at-Large

Transcribed by H. M. Egbert from the private papers of an Englishman who for a time was an unofficial diplomat in the most secret service of the British Government.

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It was realized in England long ago that if ever the opportunity developed Turkey would seek to do Great Britain all the damage that was possible. The Ottoman government had never forgiven us for the occupation of Egypt, although Turkey's predominance was recognized, her autonomy upheld, and an annual tribute of \$2,000,000 was paid her for her shadowy claims upon the land of the pyramids.

Fehmet Effendi was a Copt, one of the same race that flourished in the days of the Ptolemies and proliferated under the Pharaohs. It was not until England laid hands upon Egypt that the harassed Egyptian knew the meaning of liberty and education. Having acquired these advantages, he naturally looked longingly back upon the days when the Turk scourged him and harassed him with taxes. A whole generation of educated men had grown up, native Egyptians whose hatred of their British benefactors was greater than their hate of anything else.

Take one of the lower races, educate it, place in its hands all the advantages of modern science, and you have raised up a power for evil that you will have great difficulty in subduing again. The case of Fehmet Effendi is an apt example. He had been trained at the medical department of the Constantinople university, which was created by British enterprise and for a long time subsidized by men and women eager to bring the knowledge of medical science to the Turkish empire and to promote the development of hygiene among the people of that nation.

After the Balkan war, when the rumblings of the coming storm in Europe began to raise hopes in Constantinople that the restoration of Turkish predominance was approaching, Fehmet Effendi received a mission from the Ottoman government. He had known of him as a dangerous man; he had been forbidden to return to Egypt, and he was one of the "suspects" on whom the eyes of a number of secret service men were directed.

It was quite by chance I learned that he was going to the island of Socotra, a wild, barren, and barbarous British dependency off the east coast of Africa. Nominally under British control, actually Socotra is inhabited by a mongrel race of Arabs, who live under their own laws, or lack of laws, and are kept in wholesome restraint only by the periodical visits of British warships.

My informant was a colleague of the professor who had frequently performed valuable services for my government. He confided to me that Doctor Fehmet's mission was for the purpose of making certain experiments which, if successful, were to be repeated in Great Britain or India; and that these experiments were to be of a startling character.

I telegraphed at once in cipher to the foreign office in London, and, within a few hours, received instructions to follow Fehmet to Socotra on board the "Nymph," which would touch at that island on her way to India and would sail from Southampton in a couple of weeks.

This gave Fehmet plenty of leeway; nevertheless, as he was to travel by private yacht, and the British government did not attach sufficient importance to the matter to supply me with similar means of making the journey, I was forced to wait patiently. In due course we sailed, and the "Nymph" dropped me at Muscat, the little port of call, with the promise of picking me up in a month's time when she returned from Calcutta with a battalion of British regulars.

I had thought out my plans during the voyage. Whatever the doctor's intentions might be, it was necessary to win his confidence in order to obtain information. I had assured myself that the German government was backing him in his enterprise, and had provided myself with certain forged credentials purporting to emanate from Herr von Martin, one of the permanent under-secretaries for foreign affairs. On reaching Muscat I installed myself in the local hotel, as it can be called in courtesy, and then set forth to gain the acquaintance of Doctor Fehmet in his small house on the hill, which he had rented from a Europeanized sheik.

It was a hot walk up the hill, and my first view of the man, as he stood in his tropical uniform at the door of his cottage, was by no means an inviting one. The man's face was fascinating in its brutality. It was the face that appears so constantly on the old Egyptian monuments, the face not of the slave but of the slave-driver, enormously strong, with a sensual and repulsive physiognomy, a bald head, and a corpulent frame which seemed to flow—there is no other word—within the limitations of his silk tunic coat and trousers. Fehmet Effendi seemed to be the incarnation of the basest qualities dominated by what was undoubtedly a high intellectuality. I even felt a certain fear as I remembered that two were alone in the midst of an uncivilized and fanatical population,

After breakfast, when he had thawed out a little, he took me into his laboratory, which was better equipped than I had expected. There was a large table, on which he had laid out his specimens, his microscopes, test tubes and slides. Upon the floor a concoction of broth was boiling over an alcohol lamp. There was a cold jellied bouillon in a large jar, which, he informed me, he himself had prepared.

"Aysha can't jolly bouillon," he explained. "Curse the little devil! Some day I shall take a whip to her. But it will be a fine feat, Herr von Elmsner—a devil's feat, and if it proves successful, as I have no doubt, we shall hold a banquet in London."

He handed me a clear and began fussing with the slides. Presently he turned to me abruptly.

"You are acquainted with my plans, Herr von Elmsner?" he inquired.

"No," I replied. "That is the reason why I have come here."

He grunted and began pacing the floor, swinging his long, gorilla-like arms. The man's resemblance to one of the anthropoids was a startling one; he was an anthropoid with the brain of a man and the soul of a fiend. It was fascinating, an appalling combination.

Presently he came close to me. "We are fighting England," he said, "and we shall show no more scruple than she has shown. Picture that accursed island, Herr von Elmsner, with its huge, sprawling, ramshackle, indefensible empire, standing in the way of all his man's aspirations. She has robbed all nations of their birthright. And it is fitting that we shall rob her of her own. We Moslems have too long been cooped up in the arid, stifling plains of Asia Minor and in the sands of Egypt. But suppose England, with her fertile fields, were ours—empty? That is the difficulty. Even when we have conquered England we shall still find it overrun with her British swarms. But what did the Anglo-Saxons do? They exterminated the Celts and occupied an empty land. Very well. The modern world is too squeamish to tolerate wholesale slaughter. But if we can introduce a germ which will wipe out the inhabitants of the island without leaving one survivor? A germ which will kill infallibly? A germ which shall instill its virus into every man, woman and child, without exception? Eh, Herr von Elmsner?"

The horror of the conception fastened itself on me. I understood now that this fiend was experimenting with such a germ in Socotra, with a view to devastating the island as an experiment. If he succeeded he would repeat the procedure in England.

"But is there such a germ?" I asked, restraining my impulse to draw my revolver and destroy him. "And how will you procure it?"

"There is such a germ, Herr von Elmsner," he answered, "and it can be procured. It is the pneumonic plague. Not a bubonic, observe, from which a full fifty per cent recover under favorable circumstances, but the pneumonic, which, during the late epidemic in Manchuria, slew exactly one hundred per cent of those whom it attacked. Nobody who was infected with it survived. Unfortunately we do not know where to find the germ, for the disease disappears periodically from the face of the earth, and this is one of its quiescent periods."

"Then how can you obtain it, Fehmet Effendi?"

"Upon these goat-broth preparations," he answered, "you will see a certain germ. Observe!"

He poured a drop of bouillon from a test tube on one of the slides and pushed it beneath the microscope. Within the clear drop of jelly I could see a multitude of tiny organisms.

"That is the coryza germ, which produces the common cold," said the Egyptian. "Do you know that within the past year the discovery has been made that all germ life is a variation of a single organism and can be transformed? It is the greatest discovery since Pasteur. Under the violet ray,

then, we can transform the coryza germ into the pneumonic germ, which everybody carries in his throat without injury to himself until the lowering of the vitality enables it to proliferate and fasten upon the lungs. From the pneumonic germ, by the same process, we get the typhoid. From the typhoid the bacillus of anthrax. These come two diplocoeci which are innocuous to man but deadly in the sheep. From the second we get the germ of yeast, which, in turn, under suitable conditions becomes cholera. Then follow scarlet fever, blue mold, the little organisms that curdle milk, the vinegar germ, an unknown which I call X, and—pneumonic plague. And these are the successive transformations of the original, benign coryza."

He began to pace the room enthusiastically, swinging his long arms like tails. There seemed a supernatural power in him, as the bald head contained a superhuman ingenuity.

"Herr von Elmsner," he said, coming close to me again, "you and I are educated men. We know that matter is all that exists. Some might think it wrong to destroy the inhabitants of peaceful Socotra in order to provide an experiment for a greater holocaust. But we are not burdened with souls and consciences and all the rest of the ghostly paraphernalia invented as Nietzsche says, for the enslavement of the strong by the weak. In three weeks, Herr von Elmsner, my germ will have been created and Socotra becomes a desert. Woe to England then! The song of hatred shall sound louder than the shell. Our army of pneumococci shall mow more fiercely than a thousand bullets!"

I realized that his hatred of England had become an obsession with him. The seriousness of the situation came home to me now. My only means of coping with him was by murder; to that I could not stoop, and my hope was to keep him under observation and, if possible, to delay his work until the "Nymph" returned.

So the days passed. Fehmet had, as I have said, made friends with the natives. It was his policy, he told me, to bring them together, to inspire confidence in them, and then, at some assembly, to break the tubes containing the pneumococci upon the ground, that they might inhale them. But as the days went by he grew more and more worried.

"You remember, Herr von Elmsner," he said, "I told you that between the vinegar germ and the pneumococcus there is an unknown organism which I have called 'X.' The last stage baffles me. The spirococcus will not become a coccus. I have tried agar and milk, but the lack of some suitable element of nutrition prevents the transformation. Yesterday I had almost succeeded, but the violet light killed the cultures."

Night after night he pored over his slides, his Crookes refractor bathing him in the sickly violet hue from the short end of the spectroscopic arc as he sat at his table.

It was at the end of the month that I heard him cry out one night, so loudly that I rushed into the laboratory, thinking he had met with an injury.

"I have it!" he shouted exultantly, as he saw me. "Herr von Elmsner, come here!"

It was late in the evening. The violet rays made him look more like a devil than ever. He was wearing a bandage around his wrist—I noticed that, but it did not occur to me to ask him whether he had hurt himself. Personally I hoped he had got blood-poisoning. It made me feel like an accessory to a murder, unwilling accomplice though I was, to be a spectator of that infernal pot-boiling.

He shoved the microscope toward me. "Look!" he shouted.

I looked through the glass and saw that the spirilla of the unknown germ had clustered together; they were changing form as I watched them. The sight of these little vegetative organisms, each charged with death in the most terrible form that could be devised, sickened me. I thrust the microscope away and left the room. Fehmet took my place at the table and went to work again.

I walked into my room and sat before the window. It was one of those cool evenings that occur in Socotra toward the end of January. The picture before me was superb, the tall palm trees, with their graceful fronds, drooping beside the rivulet that ran before the door. The huts of the Arabs stood thickly clustered against the base of the hill. Our cottage was on a plateau, above which rose the scorched peak of El Musuk. I heard the natives chanting in their village, and suddenly I thought of Mohammed. He had not been to the cottage that day. On the last occasion of his appearance Fehmet had struck him for some delinquency. He had warned that Mohammed was plotting mischief, and gleefully announced his intention of carrying out the threat he had made to kill him.

I went to bed and for a long time I heard Fehmet pacing up and down in his laboratory, growing to himself, as was his habit when he was excited. Presently he went into his room and paced there. At last I heard the spring of his bed creak as he laid his heavy body upon it. And I slept.

I was awakened by a fearful pandemonium. I heard shouts and curses, and, over all, the voice of the Egyptian, howling like a demon. I sprang out of bed, thrust on my slippers, and ran to the door. I saw Fehmet struggling in the midst of a group of dusky figures. He knocked them down like temples, turned, and bolted for the laboratory. He rushed back, carrying something in either hand. He flung them to the ground, there came the sound of splintering glass, and a little cloud of dust arose. Next instant he fell beneath the impact of a blow upon the back of his head, and at the same moment I was seized and overpowered.

The Arabs fastened ropes about our bodies and dragged us up to the top of El Musuk. Bruised and bleeding, they hung us upon the barren summit and tied us back to back. Then the elder of the village addressed us.

We were to be left there, without water, until we died of thirst. We were to freeze by night and burn by day. The Feringhees would know enough then to leave their women alone. They would not kill us, because it was against the law of England, but they were not compelled to bring us water.

The Arabs gathered about us, taunting and buffeting us. Why they included me in the sentence I could not understand, unless their fanaticism flamed out against me as a representative of the detested foreign rule. During the ensuing hour they inflicted on us every abomination of insult.

Fehmet, when he had realized that it was useless to struggle, gave them back taunt for taunt. He was brave—I admit that. He told them that they would all be dead men before he died. Had they seen the bottles he broke? In each of them was a million gods of pestilence, who would carry death through Socotra.

They went away at last and Fehmet and I lay side by side. There was no possibility of freeing ourselves, and there was nothing to do but wait in the faint hope that the "Nymph" would appear, learn of our predicament, and rescue us. The thought of death was repugnant enough to me, old man though I am, but death yoked to Fehmet was repulsive. I shrank away from him, and I think he understood my feeling, for presently he spoke to me.

"It is hard for you, Herr von Elmsner," he said, with a sneer, "but after all, if you had not been placed here with me I should have killed you tomorrow. You fool of an Englishman, did you suppose that you could deceive me with your letters from Berlin? Why, I put my scheme before Herr von Jagow, and he told the attendant to put me out of his office! If I kept you alive and amused myself with you, it was merely because it gratified me to do so."

"In three days more the yacht that brought me here will return to carry me away," he said. "I can live three days without water, and by the end of that time the Socotrans will all be dead. You, too, will be dead, of the pneumonic plague which is at this moment fastening itself upon you."

"And you?" I questioned.

He roared his gorilla bellow. "I vaccinated myself this afternoon," he answered. "The plague cannot touch me, as it will you, for I have a thousand million plague bacilli in my body, which are neutralized by the virus which I inhaled from the broken test-tubes. But you, poor wretch of a spy!"

The night wore on, and Fehmet taunted me at intervals. But I cared nothing for his words, nor yet for the frost which gradually gave way, as the sun arose, to suffocating heat. I realized that the deadly plague had me in its power, and it was not a pleasant death to die.

Toward noon the Arabs visited us and stood around us. By this time thirst had induced a partial delirium in me. I remember seeing Mohammed poke Fehmet in the abdomen with a forked stick, and seeing my companion struggle like a wild beast against his tormentor. Then I became unconscious until I was aroused by feeling Fehmet shake me.

"Von Elmsner," he mumbled, "I—how do you feel?"

"Thirsty," I tried to answer, but I found that my jaw—not my tongue—was swollen, so that the words would hardly come from my lips.

Fehmet looked at me, and I saw terror in the man's eyes.

"It is the bubonic plague!" he



"In Three Weeks, Herr von Elmsner, My Germ Will Have Been Created and Socotra Becomes a Desert."

WESTERN MINING AND OIL NEWS

Western Newspaper Union News Service.

Metal Market Prices.

Spelter, St. Louis, \$15.70.
Copper, casting, \$18.45.
Lead, New York, \$5.25.
Bar silver, 54 1/2c.

Arizona.

Ore that will run 30 per cent pure silver is reported in the Red Cross mine near Yuma.

C. S. Israel of Wichita, Kan., purchased the placer holdings of the Lafayette company on Lynx creek near Prescott.

Shipping from the Thompson group of lead-silver mines in the Black Rock district of Yavapai county was begun by a California syndicate which has recently taken over the property.

At Miami Inspiration is treating 5,000 tons of ore per day and according to the management the mill will work up to a full capacity of 15,000 to 20,000 tons daily before the end of the year.

All the mines and prospects under development in the various mining districts tributary to Kingman are responding splendidly to the individual efforts of their owners and the work is employed.

New Mexico.

The Meeker Mining Company has started a force of men to work on their property at Pinos Altos.

A contract for oil exploration and development work has been made with the State Land Department.

The Santa Fe Gold & Copper Company, operating in the San Pedro district, is shipping about ten tons of high-grade copper matte daily.

New Mexico is one of the greatest mining states in the Union, and the wonderful growth of this industry in the past several years is attracting attention of capitalists.

George H. Utter of Silver City is back of a movement to organize in New Mexico a state chapter of the American Mining Congress, such an organization to affiliate with the national body. Mr. Utter, who was a delegate from New Mexico to the recent annual convention of the National Mining Congress held in San Francisco, says that with the initial membership of fifty, such a chapter can be formed.

Wyoming.

Second tortors on his oil claims are upheld by Judge Raymond of Cody.

Thermopolis men sold 160 acres of land in the Elk Basin to the Ohio Oil Company for \$110,000.

The 20-stamp reduction plant in the Seminoe mining district is bringing good returns for its owners.

The Greybull Oil and Development Company has leased thirty-six acres adjacent to the Greybull townsite, and will sink several wells simultaneously. The ground is proven oil territory, already having several flowing wells.

An even score of drilling rigs now are working in the new oil field of which the town of Greybull is the center, and arrangements are in progress to double this number. Four wells were brought in during the past week, the largest, owned by the Midwest Oil Company, being a gusher.

Colorado.

A depth of 2,150 feet, with sinking still in progress, has been attained in the main shaft of the Golden Cycle mine on Bull Hill.

Fine weather facilitates the shipment of ores from Cripple Creek mines.

A new station pump is to be installed at the Down Town Penrose shaft at Leadville.

The Gold King Mining Company paid a \$10,000 dividend for November, making a total of \$1,351,895 paid in dividends since 1922.

Recently over averaging a little over \$100 per ton was encountered on the property of the Ores and Metals Mining Company, near Ouray.

The search for tungsten ores has drawn to Boulder county a number of good miners, with resulting rich strikes in the older gold-silver mines.

Recent developments in the potash industry whereby the mineral alumite has become recognized as a possible source of potash have aroused interest in the Rocky Mountain region.

For the first time since August, 1914, the month which witnessed the declaration of war, bar silver was on Nov. 24 quoted in London, New York and Denver at 54.5 cents per ounce fine, an advance of 14 points in twenty-four hours.

Settlement has been made on the second carload shipment, a twenty-four ton lot of ore, from the Alex Hickman & Co. lease on block 160 of the Stratton estate, on the Shoo Fly mining claim on Womack's hill. The ore mined at grass roots was settled for on the basis of 3.54 ounces gold, or \$70.39 to the ton.

The excitement caused by the recent discoveries on Tenderfoot and Womack hills in Cripple Creek is slowly extending the field for prospectors to Carbonate and Mineral hills.

DENIES VIRTUE OF MADSTONE

California Newspaper Thinks Superstition Has Much to Do With Belief in Its Effectiveness.

Belief in the virtue of the "mad stone" for curing the bites of insects and reptiles and preventing hydrophobia is a reminiscence of ancient superstition. It is simply a "hangover" from the days when the causes of diseases were unknown—when most diseases were supposed to be caused by evil spirits or other equally intangible things. We know now that the poisoning from insect and snake bites is due to a toxin injected into the blood, and that hydrophobia is the result of a germ.

There is just one way in which the application of a madstone might be beneficial. If it were boiled in milk and applied to the wound made by a mad dog, biting bat, it might cauterize the tissues and thus destroy the germs. Otherwise it could have no possible effect, except in the mind of the victim. But there are several other methods of cauterizing and disinfecting a wound that are simpler, better and less painful. The mixture of iodine, or pure alcohol, or dilute carbolic acid are the modern substitutes that are much more effective than even a thoroughly boiled madstone.—Los Angeles Times.

Writing at High Speed.

Cardinal Newman once said, according to Lord Acton's report that "nothing is fit to be printed that has not been written twice over."

Nothing? Not even the Waverley novels?

The more rapid method is not all ways and altogether fatal to distinguished writing. As there are orators who capture their most telling phrases when face to face with an audience, so here are writers to whom the happy thought and the exact word come most readily when the printer is clamoring for copy.

At any rate, the demand for high speed in composition saves man from the over-elaboration, the fussy search for the unconventional, which makes some ingeniously fashioned pages almost unreadable.

And, if it comes to that, were not "Hamlet" and "King Lear" potboilers?

Cottonseed Flour Nutritious.

Flour made from cotton seed is a valuable food for general consumption, and an inexpensive substitute for meat. It is remarkably high in protein, which is the flesh-producing substance of meat, and is readily digested by the gastric juices.

Cottonseed flour is made from the kernel of the seed after the oil has been pressed from it. It is a highly concentrated food and is in no way intended to replace wheat flour or other cereals. It could not safely be used as such because an excess of protein is probably as damaging to the human system as the lack of it. It should be mixed with three or four parts of wheat flour in making into a dough.

Better Than He Expected.

An elderly negro in Georgia, charged with the theft of some chickens, had the misfortune to be defended by a young and inexperienced attorney, although it is doubtful whether anyone could have obtained acquittal, the commission of the crime having been proved beyond all doubt.

The negro received a pretty severe sentence. "Thank you, sah," said he cheerfully, addressing the judge when the sentence had been pronounced.

"Dat's mighty hard, sah, but it ain't anywhere what I spected. I thought, sah, dat between my character and dat speech of my lawyer you'd hang me, shore."